

Establishing an Adult Learning Disability Clinic Through Multidisciplinary Teamwork

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Introduction

Over the past 18 months, the orthotics team at The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust (RWT) has collaborated with the adult learning disability (ALD) team Black Country Healthcare (BCH), to create a clinic tailored for adults with specialist learning and behavioural needs. This initiative was driven by a recognition that the ALD patient group lacked sufficient support, posing a barrier to accessing appropriate treatment. In a recent study, Dr Samuel Tromans found that, adult patients with learning disabilities have reduced levels of confidence and trust in their healthcare professional and/or feel their needs are not met¹. Orthotics at RWT is committed to fostering inclusion through person-centred care that upholds the rights, dignity, and individuality of each patient. With this in mind, we sought to improve service accessibility and strengthen our relationships with both service users and the multidisciplinary team.

Establishing a Dedicated Clinic Space

A calm, sensory-friendly environment was created within the Orthotics department at Cannock Chase Hospital to support adults with learning disabilities. This space reduces sensory overload and promotes focus, comfort, and engagement during appointments.

Accessibility and Patient Confidence

Cannock Chase Hospital was chosen for its:

- Easy access via public transport and car.
- Simplified layout and improved parking.
- Reduced travel stress and increased confidence.
- Enhanced patient experience and appointment retention.

Method

Monthly Clinic Operations

The clinic runs once a month, offering:

- 30–60-minute appointments.
- Domiciliary visits for patients unable to attend.
- Sensory packs funded by the Trust charity to ease hospital visits.

Appointments include:

- One orthotist and one physiotherapist.
- Physiotherapists triage behavioural needs and provide continuity and reassurance.
- Carers contribute insights into patients' baseline health and wellbeing.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration

The clinic works closely with:

- Speech and language therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Behavioural services

This integrated approach ensures holistic care and tailored support.

Patient Feedback

A survey conducted in August 2024 assessed:

- Overall experience
- Friendliness
- Clarity of communication
- Involvement in decision-making

Results

Three out of five patients responded. Feedback was reviewed by the team to guide improvements.

The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of respondents rating the clinic as 'very good'. Additionally, all patients reported feeling listened to and understood the content of their appointment. A recurring theme in the comments was the appreciation for how staff directly involved patients in discussions, rather than addressing only their care team.

One piece of constructive feedback noted that the number of people present during the appointment could feel overwhelming to the patient group. This concern was in reference to the presence of a physiotherapy student and orthotic apprentice. In response, the team now ensure that all patients and care staff are asked in advance whether they are comfortable with additional staff being present in the clinic room.

How would you rate your overall experience?



Discussion

Good communication can improve clinical outcomes, patient safety and reduce claims of malpractice⁵. Utilising a multidisciplinary team approach to treating adults with a learning disability is a way of ensuring good communication and collaboratively establishing a person's treatment plan. This clinic has created a structured and supportive environment which has resulted in better compliance and positive feedback from the patient group⁶.

Conclusion

Having a dedicated orthotics clinic for adults with learning disability can improve accessibility to the service. Patients feel comfortable and supported which increases compliance. Multidisciplinary team working should be considered essential for a successful ALD orthotics service.

References

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